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ABSTRACT

Based on Sun Tzu's book "The Art of War," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that the book has become required reading in military curricula as well as business, economics, and political science classes, and that many cultures rely on ancient texts and ideas for advice and guidance. The main activity in the lesson involves students interviewing business people to determine if business is conducted as if it were war. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN: The Art of War

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Beth Lemberger, social studies teacher, Owen Brown Middle School, Columbia, Maryland.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* has become required reading not only in military curricula but in business, economics, and political science classes as well.

2. Many cultures rely on ancient texts and ideas for advice and guidance in today's world.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

The book *Art of War* by Sun Tzu or an electronic version of the text (see list in Related Links)

PROCEDURE:

1. After you have worked with the class to analyze the text of or the video about Sun Tzu's *Art of War,* or both (see Materials and Related Links), or have given the students a lecture about *Art of War,* have students gather firsthand research through interviews to see if today's executives conduct business as if it were war. First, teach students the general guidelines for conducting an effective and courteous interview:

- The interviewer must accommodate the interviewee's schedule, inconveniencing the interviewee as little as possible. Once the interviewee agrees to be interviewed, the interviewer should make a specific appointment and then confirm the appointment as the date approaches. During the interview, the interviewer must watch the clock and not exceed the agreed-upon duration for the interview.

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- The interviewer must find the right balance between showing genuine respect for the interviewee and not letting the interviewee duck critical questions.

- The interviewer must do his or her homework and completely avoid asking questions of fact (such as interviewee's date and place of birth) that are answered in records available to the interviewer. Such questions waste time. The interviewer should go into the interview with four or five substantive questions thought out in advance. Then the interviewer must listen carefully to the interviewee's response so that he or she can ask a follow-up question or two based on the response instead of slavishly following the list of questions he or she brought to the interview.

- As much as possible, the questions should be built around *who? what? where? when? why?* And *how?* so that answers provide substantive information rather than simply *yes* or *no.*

- The interviewer must take careful notes or, with permission, tape-record the interview.

- As soon after the interview as possible, the interviewer should write up the interview, contacting the interviewee if necessary to clarify or verify facts.

- Without being obsequious, the interviewer should thank the interviewee for agreeing to the interview and for responsiveness during the interview. The interviewer should offer to show the interviewee the write-up of the interview before publishing or otherwise using the interview.

2. Have students conduct practice interviews with each other so that you and classmates can offer constructive criticism on interview content and style.

3. Brainstorm with the class a list of businesspeople whom students would like to interview about business techniques and strategies, business successes and failures. List only businesspeople in the community who you have reason to think will agree to visit the class and submit to an interview by students.

4. With class input, decide on a few businesspeople whom students will ask to grant them an interview. For each subject, put together five students who will work as a committee to conduct a successful interview. Allow the committee to choose the spokesperson who will request the appointment for the interview and who will lead off the in-person interview and draw it to a conclusion later on. That student may make the request for the interview by phone or in writing. (The request should acknowledge that several students will conduct the interview together.) Make sure the other students on the committee understand they must contribute to the preinterview research, help to generate the prepared questions, ask follow-up questions during the interview, and collaborate on the final, written interview.

5. Help each committee bring to the interview what the class has learned about Sun Tzu's principles. That is, help students generate questions that will elicit the interviewee's thoughts about battling to win customers, running a disciplined campaign, beating the competition, coming in first, winning at all costs, playing fair, playing tricks, and prioritizing goals.

6. Give each committee a two-part written assignment: (1) prepare a written report of the interview, and (2) end the report with one or more paragraphs on how the businessperson practices or does not practice Sun Tzu's guidelines about war.

7. Ask students who have not taken part on the interview committees to act as peer editors of the committees' written work, calling for revisions as appropriate.

ADAPTATIONS:

Adaptations for Older Students:
Older students may conduct their interviews at sites other than your classroom. Since you will not be observing them during the interview, they should rate themselves on the quality of the interview session. That is, they will have to tell you how the interview session transpired—very smoothly, mostly smoothly, or not smoothly (see Evaluation).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* was written 2,500 years ago in ancient China. However, its principles are still valid and useful today. What other ancient texts or ideas do we rely on for advice and guidance in today's world? How do they compare with Sun Tzu's work?

2. Discuss how improvements in technology changed *The Art of War* since ancient China. Do these new weapons invalidate Sun Tzu's principles of The Art of War?

3. Discuss ways in which the American and Chinese views of life differ. How are these reflected in art and ways of life?

4. How have Sun Tzu's strategies in *The Art of War* been adopted by American business? Identify which particular strategies would benefit business practices.

5. Discuss Sun Tzu's principles: "the essence of war is dislocating the enemy psychologically, then dominating him;" "he whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious;" and "agitate your enemy and ascertain the pattern of his movement, determine his position and so ascertain the field of battle, probe him and learn where his strength is abundant and where it is deficient." Explain how these ideas help in a war and in other aspects of life.

6. Discuss the barriers that prevent Westerners from truly understanding the Asian culture. Why do you think people need to bridge the gap of cultural understanding now more than ever? What are some ways each culture can come to better understand the other?

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate the committees using the following rubric:
Only those committees whom you expect to grade with a 3 or 2 should proceed with meeting the interviewee; committees who are doing a below-average job of preparing for the interview should not proceed with the interview and will earn a grade of 1.

- **Three points:** more than three sources used for research about interviewee; first draft of interview questions in very good shape; very smooth and respectful interview; complete and well-written report on the interview and on the influence of Sun Tzu on the interviewee

- **Two points:** three sources used for research about interviewee; first draft of interview questions needing substantive revision; mostly smooth and respectful interview; adequate report on the interview and on the influence of Sun Tzu on the interviewee

- **One point:** See note above
You can elicit from students why you will not let an inadequately prepared committee proceed with an interview of a businessperson.

EXTENSION:

Military Briefing
Near the end of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, then Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara released the now infamous Pentagon Papers, detailing top-secret U.S. actions in Indochina from the end of World War II through 1968. Among the nearly 2.5 million words in these documents were accounts of sabotage and terror warfare against the North Vietnamese. Have your students use the Pentagon Papers and several other resources to research the specific strategies of the United States and the North Vietnamese in their campaigns to establish leadership in South Vietnam. Then have the students write a briefing to military advisers from the perspective of an American general in 1969. They should incorporate quotations from Sun Tzu's *Art of War* as appropriate in their report.

Globalization
Discuss with students how business and tourism among nations has changed since, say, 1980. What evidence do they have that one country now influences other countries much more and much faster than in the past? As nations become more like one another in products, services, and social trends, will leaders apply Sun Tzu's philosophy more or less?

SUGGESTED READINGS:

A History of Warfare
John Keegan. Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
Do all civilizations owe their origins to making war? Read about the role of violence and war in all cultures from the Stone Age to the present day, and the need to end our capacity for violence and war.

The Lost Art of War
Sun Tzu II. Harper San Francisco, 1996.
Sun Tzu II, a military strategist also known as Sun Bin, was a descendent of Sun Tzu, whose book on war was discovered in a Chinese tomb in 1972. He wrote about military tactics and strategies that can be applied to government, business, and social action.

WEB LINKS:

The Art of War by Project Gutenberg
A public domain copy of the e-text of *Art of War* is available for downloading.
http://promo.net/pg/_titles/T.html

Sun Tzu's Art of War: Attack by Strategem
An index to *Art of War* with abbreviated points to enhance understanding.
http://www.user.giga.net.au/rikk/artofwar3.htm

The Art of Diplomacy in The Art of War
Article based on Sun Tzu dealing with diplomacy in war.
http://www.diplom.org/Zine/F1995M/Szykman/Art.html

Chinese History
An extensive index of Chinese history to use with the study of Sun Tzu.
http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~felsing/cstuff/history.html

Sun Tzu
Easier-to-read print version of Sun Tzu's biography. Includes comments on sections of *Art of War*.
http://www.jersey-village.com/sun.htm

VOCABULARY:

diplomacy
The art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations.
Context:
The conflict Sun Tzu is talking about in his book differs from the Western definition, because it includes areas of politics and diplomacy, such as trade and international relations.

espionage
The practice of spying or using spies to obtain information about the plans and activities especially of a foreign government or a competing company.
Context:
In a war, espionage is the most effective way to get information about the enemy.

holistic
Concerned with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts.
Context:
While the Westerner seals the world into watertight compartments, the Easterner takes a more holistic view.

philosophy
The body of knowledge and values held by a culture; ethics.
Context:
Chinese philosophy comes from watching nature.

totality
Sum; whole.
Context:
What perhaps distinguishes Sun Tzu is the way that he views conflict as a totality.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks:
Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres.

Benchmark: Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

Benchmark: Understands the effects of complex literary devices and techniques on the overall quality of a work.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: civics

Standard: Understands the impact of significant political and nonpolitical developments on the Unites States and other nations.

Benchmarks:
Understands the principal effects that economic conditions, technological developments, and cultural developments in other nations have had on American society and the lives of American citizens.

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description

About 2,500 years ago, a Chinese military general named Sun Tzu distilled the essence of Chinese philosophy into a manual for war. Discover the principles at the heart of the book, and learn why Art of War has become required reading not only in military curricula, but in business, economics, and political science classes as well.

View Video Clip | View Lesson Plan

Download Comprehension Questions & Answers

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
Sun Tzu's Art of War

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What events characterized the decline of China's Golden Age around 500 BC?

2. Why did Chinese philosophy originate during the Era of Warring States?

3. What was Sun Tzu's advice to kings who took the idea of warfare too lightly?

4. Why were Chinese books an important part of ancient Chinese culture?

5. How have archaeologists learned much about ancient Chinese warfare and life in general?

6. Where was the first European edition of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* published?

7. How is the Asian view of war more holistic than the Western view of war?

8. What basic concept from Sun Tzu's *Art of War* was adopted by Wall Street in the 1980s?

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Sun Tzu's Art of War

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What events characterized the decline of China's Golden Age around 500 BC?
China witnessed a decline in its Golden Age when battles changed from a field sport of the nobles to serious and bloody warfare. Civil life also became more violent.

2. Why did Chinese philosophy originate during the Era of Warring States?
Chinese philosophy originated during the Era of Warring States in an attempt to stop the violence in political and civil life. The Taoists turned to nature to try to accomplish this task.

3. What was Sun Tzu's advice to kings who took the idea of warfare too lightly?
Sun Tzu explained to the kings that war was a very serious business that risked the stability of their states. It should only be undertaken after great deliberation and only with great skill.

4. Why were Chinese books an important part of ancient Chinese culture?
In ancient Chinese culture, books were important because they passed on the wisdom of tradition.

5. How have archaeologists learned much about ancient Chinese warfare and life in general?
Archaeologists have learned much about ancient Chinese warfare and life in general through objects found in elaborate tombs. They have found weapons, "toiletry kits," bowls, eating utensils, and even a 2,100 year-old edition of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.

6. Where was the first European edition of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* published?
The first European edition of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* was published in France in 1772. Some say that Napoleon studied Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.

7. How is the Asian view of war more holistic than the Western view of war?
The Western view of war is confined to the battlefield. The Asian view of war includes the battlefield, trade, politics, and international relations as tools in the conflict.

8. What basic concept from Sun Tzu's *Art of War* was adopted by Wall Street in the 1980s?
In the 1980s, Wall Street adopted Sun Tzu's basic concept that the object in war and in business was to win with as little effort and time and with as much reward as possible.

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